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A SECOND ADDRESS TO THE PUBLIC FROM THE SOCIETY FOR CONSTITUTIONAL INFORMATION.

WERE political evils as unavoidable as physical ones, it would justify the indolence and despondency, with which we are too apt to endure their pressure. Were the loss of public liberty, the decline and servitude of nations as much beyond the reach of human exertion to prevent as the great causes of natural calamities, it would not be surprizing, that men should derive their greatest consolation from insensibility, and tamely submit to what it was not granted them to avoid.—But, happily for the species, most of the moral circumstances, upon which its happiness depends, are placed so much within its power, that it may in general be said to be the only author of its good or evil fortune. Do we see a particular community advancing to power and glory, do we see it shadowing the ocean with its fleets, extending its commerce, and giving law to the surrounding nations, we shall not be deceived in concluding, that it retains an internal principle of vigour, which has hitherto preserved its government from gross corruption, and kept it true to the original ends of its institution. Do we on the contrary see that success deserts its arms, that commerce languishes, that its military ardour evaporates in feeble and fruitless efforts, that the tide of opulence is at an ebb, that its consequence, as well as the opinion of its force, diminishes with its neighbours, we may safely pronounce that there is some internal defect, of which these calamities are only the indication. In such a country vain will be the attempt to restore its drooping fortune, by any means which fall short of a radical reformation. In vain may fleets be fitted out, in vain may armies be raised, in vain may generals be recalled, or ministers displaced; these changes may accelerate, or retard, but can never prevent approaching ruin.—While the spirit and manners of the Roman commonwealth remained entire, neither the invasion of Pyrrhus, the victories of Hannibal, nor the bloody irruptions of the Gauls, were capable of shaking it on its firm foundations; but when that haughty people had submitted to the common yoke, it beheld the loss of ancient glory accompany the decline of ancient manners.

A foolish or effeminate prince, surrounded by a venal senate, to whom the very name of virtue is either unknown or odious, was not born to retain dominions acquired by republican wisdom, and republican valour :

nor could a people, which had lost all pretensions to govern itself, long expect to rule over others. Every attack of its rude and less corrupted neighbours severed some part of the empire from the rest, till at length the mighty fabric, which it had been the labour of ages to rear, fell in an instant; and left behind no traces of its former greatness.

In modern times this series of events which we still admire in history, has been renewed, and we now behold it hastening on to a similar catastrophe. A small and obscure people, confounded with the crowd of barbarians, which submitted to the Roman yoke, and scarcely honoured with a name, preserved through all the successive calamities it was destined to experience, the seeds of future greatness. The shocks of contending factions, the gloomy zeal of fanaticism, the attempts which were made upon its liberties, and even the civil wars which those attempts repeatedly produced, instead of depressing, have only conspired to exalt it. These contentions, which seemed to menace destruction, kept alive, by the mutual jealousies they inspired, a spirit of rational enquiry, and a knowledge of those great rights which are essential to human happiness. All the passions too, of which the mind is susceptible, being continually called forth, and applied to the noblest objects, imparted to the national character that vigour and energy, which rendered it equal to the greatest enterprizes, and insured success. It is an enquiry of the most interesting nature, why England is the only country, which has preserved in any degree of purity, that common constitution, which all the nations of Europe derived from their ancestors: in this place it is sufficient to remark, that its power and greatness have always been proportionable to the degree, in which the people have asserted their privileges.—Those who are continually declaiming against intestine divisions; and think an age of servitude a cheap redemption from a single popular commotion, will do well to consider the blaze of glory which gilded those disastrous contests which can never be remembered without a tear, the awe and terror which this people impressed upon the most powerful sovereigns of Europe, even during the usurpation of Cromwell, and the instant disgrace and shame which attended the restoration of its hereditary tyrants.

Nor is it difficult to assign a reason for these events—The Parliament which took up arms against Charles I. and carried their successes to so astonishing a length, knew that they were violating the established forms of the constitution, and therefore made a bold appeal to the common rights and common reason of the people. Nor could they hope for success, without encouraging principles the most favourable to human liberty, as well as avoiding those corruptions, which had been the ground of their opposition: for men, who are doomed to inevitable slavery, will always prefer an hereditary and prescriptive tyranny to one of a later date. They had, besides, embarked in a desperate struggle, not one of the common causes, in which the lives and property of a nation are lavished to advance the personal greatness, or gratify the private resentment of a sovereign, but such an one as roused the passions, awakened the energy, and occupied the soul of every individual. It was necessary to conquer or to perish; and this was understood by all. No private jealousies therefore, nor personal cabals, no hereditary prejudice of birth,

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none of the common arts and machinations, which place an awful distance between the favour of a sovereign, and the virtues of his subjects, were sufficiently powerful to depress ability and courage; every one gladly conspired to reward those talents upon which his own security depended, and each individual seized upon the station which he felt himself born to occupy—This is the ordinary effect of civil commotions; which, while they confound all human distinctions, frequently cure inveterate abuses, restore the youth and vigour of a community, and remove the obstacles of unfriended merit: thus the whirlwind, which spreads ruin and desolation along the earth, is sometimes known to purify the air, and dispel the collected seeds of pestilence. Nor, when the supreme power was invaded by Cromwell, was the nation therefore enslaved, or the principles of freedom subverted. That man, who united the virtues of a patriot with the ambition of a tyrant, knew, that a people which had lately dared so much and so successfully in defence of their liberty, required the guidance of a firm but cautious hand; and that it was easier to dazzle their haughty temper with the glory, than to bend it by the terrors of usurpation. He therefore applied himself so successfully to cultivate the genius of his nation, to restrain its turbulent spirit without extinguishing its vigour, to increase its commerce, improve its resources, and above all to preserve that force of discipline and simplicity of manners, without which all human power is but of short duration, that we shall not regret the eminence he attained, if we can forget the steps by which he ascended. If we compare him with the sovereigns who preceded, he alone will appear by nature intended for a throne; if with his successors, we shall perhaps apply to him, though in a different sense, that device which was invented for the perfidious Charles, “*exiit tyrannus, regum ultimus.*”

The Restoration, as we are accustomed to call it, that ensued, was accompanied with the most sinister omens. That liberty, whose maintenance had cost such streams of generous blood, and which might have been fixed upon a solid basis for succeeding ages, was made the shameful purchase of private emolument; and surrounding nations, that had turned their attention to a theatre, which presented the most awful and interesting scenes, beheld with astonishment those rights, which it had been fatal to the father to invade, resigned without a struggle to his degenerate son. A profligate and luxurious prince, infected with the vices of every country which had yielded an asylum to his wandering steps, destitute alike of private and public virtue, without faith, or gratitude, or shame, without the ambition of a tyrant, or the feelings of a man, seized without opposition the throne of the haughtiest people in the universe, and used it as an hereditary patrimony. He had been admitted without compact or stipulation, and he soon afforded a striking lesson of what that people must expect, who hold their privileges at the mercy of a king, instead of defending them by their own exertion. From the first moment of his return, he gave most unequivocal proofs, that he considered the public revenue as destined to gratify his private vices, the forces of the kingdom as the necessary engines of despotism, the enemies of his country as his natural friends, and every honest man as his inveterate foe. His life was one continued scene of riot and effeminacy, sometimes varied with the graver schemes of deliberate

tyranny ; so that it is doubtful whether his private character was more fatal to the morals, or his public one to the liberties of his country. The ancient and faithful friends of the fortunes of his family were dismissed with ignominy, for wishing to reconcile the prerogatives of the king with the safety of the nation, and the existence of a constitution ; while the chosen band of royal satellites was composed of men distinguished only by their crimes ; the most corrupt where all were venal, the most abandoned where all were profligate ; whom nothing could rescue from universal scorn, but becoming the objects of universal hatred.—It is no wonder that such a reign should have been the æra of disgrace and calamity ; that public credit should have drooped, and national honour declined ; that war should have degenerated into piracy and rapine, peace into civil and religious persecution ; that the natural friends and allies of England should have been exasperated by undeserved and unprovoked hostility : to sum up all, that a dark and baneful conspiracy should have been formed against the constitution of this country, and the liberties of mankind.

These are the evils and disgraces to which a nation must submit, that relaxes in the care of its acknowledged rights. For it is the grossest prejudice to imagine, that there is something in the soil or climate of this country, more peculiarly adapted to the preservation of Freedom. Heaven has not distributed its blessings with so partial and so sparing an hand. The noble plant will thrive in every portion of the globe, where its leaves are watered, and its roots protected ; and in every climate will it droop and wither, when it is deserted by its natural defenders. If we cast our eyes upon the neighbouring nations, which are now overwhelmed with common despotism, we shall not find one which did not originally boast a constitution similar to our own. Spain has had her Cortez, France her three estates, Germany her independent electors, Sweden and Denmark their senates. If these are now forgotten, lost and swallowed up in one promiscuous ruin, it surely becomes us to take example by their fate, and to steer the public vessel, far from a shore, which is already covered with wrecks.

How near we were to this catastrophe, the situation of our government at the Revolution may instruct us. A dark, vindictive tyrant, in spite of the opposition of the best and most enlightened part of the nation, was elevated to the throne, which he had scarcely occupied an instant, before he displayed a deliberate design of destroying the few remaining liberties of his country.—His brother had at least possessed specious vices ; but James, to all the hereditary defects of his family, added qualities which were peculiar to himself : insolence, which not contented with invading the privileges, made him irritate the passions of his people ; bigotry, so blind, so fierce, so unrestrained by reason or experience, that he armed the natural supporters of arbitrary power in defence of freedom ; and cruelty, so devoid of mercy or forgiveness, that he left no room for affection to his person, or pity to his misfortunes. Yet even under all these disadvantages, it is probable he would have prevailed, had he had no other obstacles to encounter than the opposition of his subjects ; so much had public spirit declined, so little was left of the ancient English character, such a love of indolence and pleasure, such a general supineness prevailed.—What would have ensued from such success it is not difficult

difficult to conjecture. As soon as the horrors of religious persecution had ceased, and a superstition, which adds new fury to all the malignant passions of tyrants themselves, had been once more firmly established by the destruction of every thing generous in the character of the nation, or just and equal in the principles of the constitution, that universal calm which is the surest symptom of political death would have succeeded. Under such a prince virtue and ability would have been alike suspected and odious; while the only merit was a blind implicit deference to his most extravagant commands; to speak or think with freedom had been treason; to have hesitated at any baseness, rebellion, and to have asserted the rights of the people, destruction. We may easily conceive what would have been the price of preferment, either in the church or state; and that the laws themselves, wrested into an universal engine of private oppression, would have resigned the lives and property of every individual to the disposal of the monarch; while the oracles of religion were dumb to every other purpose than that of inculcating the most vile and abject submission.—A just and equal government, which consults the happiness of mankind, is always the patron of morals, and the encourager of virtue; since neither extent of territory, nor superiority of wealth, nor the number of mercenary troops can bestow security, but the spirit, valour, and principles of its subjects armed for their own defence, and united in a common cause. Tyranny on the contrary, which always reverses the order of nature, and aims at private emolument through public ruin, finds it necessary to discourage qualities which might be formidable to itself, to weaken in order to govern, and to disarm every hand which is capable of using a sword to an honest or a generous purpose.—We may easily conceive that such a government, in its progress, would consider even industry and commerce, although the immediate principles of national vigour, as forming impediments to the views of a prince or his minister; and, with the dark and malevolent policy of Philip II. of Spain, think it necessary to introduce universal indigence and misery in order to insure obedience. In every instance, therefore, the general good would have been scandalously given up, or counteracted; the national honour basely sacrificed on every public occasion: while the most calamitous and unnatural wars were lightly entered into, or pertinaciously pursued, did they flatter the private ambition of a prince, secure the power of a minister, or increase the perquisites of a sycophant. Projects like these afford ample scope to carry on the generous designs of arbitrary government; to break the spirit of a nation by private and public calamities; invade its property by the most immoderate impositions; extinguish its few remaining privileges; abolish all distinctions but that of slave and tyrant; and bow it by every circumstance of infamy and degradation to the yoke. If we have seen the reverse of this picture take place during a long series of years which succeeded the Revolution, we must attribute it less to a change of governors, than to the courage and vigilance which the people derived from their own successful struggles, and to the renovation of the constitution.

Whatever magic there may be in particular names, whatever real distinctions in the character of individuals, experience sufficiently evinces, that the effects of power are as similar and universal as the passions and nature

of man; and that neither private obligations nor public confidence, neither shame nor gratitude, nor the sacred doctrines and influence of religion itself upon its immediate professors, have ever been sufficient to repress the inordinate effects of ambition. Were it necessary to illustrate this by example, we might shew by what steps the petty sovereigns of all the European nations have gradually emancipated themselves from their former state of limited dominion. We could, in almost every instance, ascertain the particular æra when, either by force or fraud, they have wrested from their subjects, or from their brother tyrants the nobility, each of the privileges which are now become the favourite claim of royalty. We could shew through what unparalleled crimes, by what successive scenes of perfidy and cruelty, with what an utter disregard of all the sanctions of morality and religion, as well as the continual sacrifice of public good, they have arrived at the distinguished honours they now enjoy; we could even frequently fix, with accuracy, the time, when a particular family has become divine, by throwing off every thing human in its character or conduct.

This was well understood by the subtle and comprehensive genius of Machiavel, when he asserted, that no government can be lasting which is not frequently reduced to its first principles. He knew, that laws and forms were weak barriers against the encroaching spirit of those who are intrusted with their execution; that mercenary troops can never be wanting to defend, nor casuists to vindicate, nor priests to sanctify the excesses of ambition. He lived in a country, which had seen the consular fasces borne before the destroyers of the republic; and where the most dreadful despotism that ever trampled upon the rights of nature had been erected, under the shadow of a religion which breathes peace, good-will, and equality to mankind. He therefore taught, that the vigilance and vengeance of the people must be placed like a flaming sword to guard their rights; and gave the most salutary and effectual admonitions against unlimited power, by exhibiting the crimes through which it is pursued, the horrors by which it is maintained,

That the government of England underwent this process, at least to a certain degree, must be evident to all who have studied the history of those times. Though the agents in this great business, startled at the importance of their own attempt, and wanting honesty and boldness to avow the principles upon which they acted, have left the justice they owed their country's wrongs unfinished, though latest posterity may execrate that timid or interested policy which meanly betrayed the cause of freedom, at the very instant when her triumph was complete; yet, under whatever pretext a king is driven from the throne, there can be little dispute concerning the principles upon which that expulsion must be justified. Foreign nations were indeed surprized to see the rights of humanity springing up and blossoming under the shadow of a throne; and that those who were for annihilating the liberties of millions, to gratify the pride of a few indolent usurpers, should be driven from the precincts of a court: they did not consider that the love of power, which continually impels the great to violate every duty, may even produce contrary effects; and make them, when it is their interests, encourage virtue, and patronize truth.

To these principles of our constitution, restored to part at least of their original purity, have been owing the internal stability and safety, the external glory and power of England.—In vain were the tyrants of the world leagued against that government, which rested upon the broad basis of general consent and public freedom. Vain alike were the attacks of violence, and the machinations of fraud. While civil and religious persecutors were depopulating all the continent, here might a real lover of humanity have contemplated an asylum open to the unfortunate; religion, which addressed itself to the reason, not to the fears of men; laws which defended property, without oppressing the poor; a government which preserved its own authority, without annihilating the privileges of its subjects, and subjects who had learned to obey, without abandoning their claim to resist. If warlike feats deserved a place in the page which is dedicated to human happiness, we could produce achievements which equal the lustre of Rome in its brightest blaze of glory. We could shew the ocean covered by our fleets, our arms triumphant upon every shore, and an empire not only acknowledged, but blessed by the remotest inhabitants of the globe. Such, and so irresistible are the efforts of a people, whose government is founded upon freedom, whose arms are directed by justice. But what renders the retrospect more awful and interesting, is to behold commerce, agriculture, and population, increasing even amidst the tumults of war; and numerous bands of generous adventurers, issuing from the prolific bosom of the parent state, to transport their manners, rights, religion, to the extremities of the earth, and carrying with them the protection of heaven, and the seeds of future greatness. Were we not acquainted with the continual vicissitude of human affairs, was history itself any thing but a register of public calamities, of nations enslaved, and empires sunk for ever, we surely might have considered so stupendous an edifice perfect and secure; and while we admired the beauty of the work, pronounced the eternity of the pile. Possessed of freedom so often vindicated, rights so accurately ascertained, of a government not founded upon the ravages of conquest, or the immemorial degradation of mankind, but deduced from plain and positive compact; deriving greatness not from the oppression of its neighbours, but from the blessings of nature, and the exertions of industry, this country might surely seem preserved from all the common causes of decay. Above all, whoever had turned his eyes towards this Atlantic, and beheld the majestic form of the English constitution, with all its admirable proportions and noble simplicity, imitated and improved by a multitude of rising states, which gloried in their common origin, and limited dependence upon this country, would have thought that Providence itself had directed the wondrous plan of human happiness; and we should have seen nothing within the reach of either wisdom or fortune to do, but would have only breathed a pious prayer for its perpetuity.

Let us now consider a different scene, which presents a mournful instance of the instability of human affairs, and the rapid decline of greatness. Let us in turn our eyes to the same people; and behold them labouring under the complicated calamities of hostile attacks and domestic corruptions; to go through all the horrors of an unsuccessful civil war, wasting their still remaining forces on visionary schemes of mad ambition,

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baffled and despised by their enemies, deserted by their friends, abandoned by heaven, and delivered up to almost inevitable destruction. The shades are indeed dark and dreadful; but the resemblance is too strong to be mistaken: and it is no longer time to be cheated with the deceitful colourings of hope and adulation. Whatever ills our present situation offers to our view, whatever distresses the sad perspective of future years may threaten, it is necessary to behold them with a steady eye. For thus alone can we make a proper use of the resources which yet remain, in order to procrastinate our country's fate; or, if fortitude and prudence are insufficient to avert the impending ruin, it is better to perish like men that have exerted themselves to the last, than to be swept away like helpless animals, entangled in the toil, and slaughtered without resistance.

And here we shall not scruple to apply the principles which we established at the beginning, and to assert, that such a descent from the pinnacle of greatness, to the lowest abyss of shame, could never have ensued, without a correspondent change in the principles and administration of the English government. It has been long remarked, that there is a tide in human things, which is never so near an ebb, as when it is lifted beyond its bounds, and seems to swell the highest. This circumstance, which attributed by the ignorant to some mysterious power and denominated fortune, is easily resolved by keener and more penetrating understanding, into the necessary agency of moral causes. If the very hairs of our head are numbered, and not a sparrow falls to the ground without the permission of Providence, still less can we suppose that mighty empires, which involve the destiny of millions, are detached from the general chain of causes, and left to fluctuate at random.

But as an attentive observer might have predicted the future fall of Rome, at the very instant when she exulted over the fall of her ardent rival; thus would an English patriot have trembled for his country's safety, when she had reached that point of glory which admitted no farther augmentation: and while he beheld her inveterate enemies humblest her feet, her empire extended to the opposite limits of the earth, her fleets returning with every wind, and loaded with the luxuries of every climate, he would have feared the sure contagion which has ever accompanied excessive prosperity. That contagion has long been circulating in secret through this devoted land, tainting the sources of national happiness, and corroding the vitals of the constitution. Among the people it has produced an headlong rage for trifling and dangerous pleasures, a contempt for the virtuous simplicity of antient manners, and an oblivion of their most important rights; among the great, a luxury which knows no bounds, an indifference to the public good, and a disposition to sacrifice the dignity of birth, the duties of rank, and the hope of future fame to the low enjoyments of the present moment.

Could such dispositions have long subsisted in a nation so dear to their liberties, it would have been the first exception of the kind within the annals of humanity. It would have implied a degree of wisdom, virtue, and moderation in their rulers, which no established government has yet been able to boast. We have therefore no reason to be surprized, that every possible advantage has been taken of the general blindness, and that

that a malignant influence has increased in silence, till it is almost too mighty for opposition; and by undermining every support of the constitution, threatens the entire destruction of the pile.

The stability of that constitution has, through many succeeding ages, depended upon the public virtue and integrity of our Parliaments. The necessity of a mutual co-operation between the king and the representatives of the people gave the nation every security for their rights, which they could then think necessary. Whatever grievances had been introduced during the intermission of parliaments were sure to be forcibly represented, and their redress demanded, before the exigencies of the sovereign were supplied. Men that considered themselves as the immediate agents of their fellow citizens, selected for the particular purpose of transacting public business in their names, shortly to be mingled with the common mass, and to share in all the consequences of their own conduct, could not easily be induced to impose burthens which would oppress themselves, or to surrender rights which were essential to their own safety. Nor were those modern refinements yet invented, those generous indemnifications which a grateful minister bestows upon the deputies of the people, to reward them for their patriotism and loyalty. Nor was it yet understood that a small number of individuals, frequently destitute alike of fortune, virtue, and abilities, introduced against the consent of the people voting in opposition to their opinions, and lavishing their property without their consent, had a right to disfranchise their electors, and deprive them of those very powers to which they owed their own existence. Such contradictions and absurdities are the offspring of modern times, as well as that political leger-de-main which can concentrate the essence of a populous county, or a commercial city, in a ruined sheep-fold; and which, while it gives the laborious occupier an equal share in the legislature with an hundred thousand respectable citizens, can, if necessary, annihilate the political existence of millions, make an House of Commons spring up seven, or seven hundred successive times from its own ashes, and vest the virtual representation of an immense continent in the corporation of a Cornish borough. It cannot be imagined that such doctrines can have been propagated, without giving the justest alarm to the real friends of their country. They have therefore repeatedly endeavoured to stem the torrent of corruption, to expel the minions of a court from the temple of public freedom, to restore our parliaments to their original purity, and the people to their hereditary rights; and had they succeeded in their attempts, there is every reason to believe, that we should have escaped the weight of misfortune, which is now from every quarter bursting upon our heads; nor have added to the many past examples of ambitious phrenzy, the spectacle we now afford of sinking greatness, and a shattered empire.

But it is the common failing of human beings to be more disposed to lament the pressure of misfortunes, than to take precautions against their approach, or even to exert themselves for a cure. States, like individuals, frequently become wearied with the practice of those virtues which have produced their exaltation; and in a sudden access of delirium throw away the advantages which it had cost them ages to acquire. In vain do the few unprejudiced patriots, who with more penetrating eyes look into fu-
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turity, endeavour to awaken them from their delusion, and point out the chains which are scarcely perceivable under wreaths of flowers: their sagacity is despised, their predictions slighted, their superior virtues hated, till the hour of vengeance is arrived, which dispels the short-lived dream of pleasure and security, and rouses the miserable victims to real slavery and substantial ruin.

This has been long the case with our own nation, and we are now paying the severe penalties of former folly. What repeated warnings have we received of the increasing venality of our representatives; and how often have we neglected the opportunity of placing the public liberty upon a permanent basis! But so long as there could be a doubt concerning the extent of the contagion, so long as they condescended to spread the slightest veil over their infidelity, we acquiesced in the deceit, and chose to expect that relief from time, which is only attainable by virtue: as if universal experience had not shewn, that the first infringement of national rights, which is permitted with impunity, is the introduction of every evil; that the attempts of ambition never finish but with the patience of mankind; and that there is no medium between opposing the least encroachment, and submitting to the greatest. But with our deluded countrymen every pretext, however futile and ridiculous, has been alternately sufficient to quiet their fears, and lull their jealousies. Sometimes their liberties have been invaded to defend them the better against the attacks of tyranny, sometimes because a patriot king enjoyed the throne; sometimes they were persuaded to forego redress, because the minister was embarrassed with war; sometimes because he dared not interrupt the public peace; sometimes for fear of excluding the people's real friends from power; sometimes because the people's real friends had obtained the power they sought, and must not hazard its loss. Wretched nation, that has been induced to make the disease inveterate in expectation of a cure, and that did not understand, that it was a matter of no consequence in what name, or by what party they were enslaved!

But there is a certain degree of provocation, which it is unsafe to offer even to slaves. We had seen with tranquillity our treasures wasted, and our blood poured out in quarrels which did not interest the nation; a multiplicity of laws, contrary to the principles of a free government, enacted; the national property lavished upon the nation's inveterate foes, and perpetual impositions established, as odious in their nature as oppressive in their operation. We have beheld the sacred influence of the laws sometimes perverted to oppress innocence, sometimes evaded to confer impunity upon the blackest crimes. Mercenary troops have been augmented in the hour of peace, and the guardians of the people's liberties have sanctified that universal engine of oppression. The basest means of corruption have been openly adopted and avowed as a necessary scheme of government; and lest the people at large should possess dangerous or intractable virtues, it has been judged necessary to debase the native honesty of the English character, by authorizing every thing which can most effectually subvert it. These, and a thousand other instances of public corruption, have long been familiar to our view, without engaging us to vigilance or effectual opposition; so deep has been our lethargy, so implicit our confidence in

our own security. But neither the degrading patience we have exerted, nor the licence of oppressing with impunity, nor the spoils which have rewarded our betrayers, were sufficient to content their unbounded appetite for mischief. It has been judged necessary to persecute and extirpate human liberty wherever it was found. One nation was too small a theatre for rapine; and therefore it was decided to scatter death and havock over the whole western continent, and to disperse enmity, division, rage, and mutual desolation through all the parts of the noblest empire in the universe. Such a project as this was indeed worth ambition! To rivet the chains of unborn millions, to blast, like a rapid pestilence, the blessings which heaven had bestowed on half the globe; to shew that neither ocean, desert, nor wilderness, is sufficiently wide or dreary to protect a single remnant of the species from the yoke!—or should they dare resist, to exercise unlimited fury against the devoted rebels; to interdict them from the common rights and mercies of war itself; let loose the ungovernable ferocity of savage rage upon their defenceless wives and children; destroy their generous and valiant youth in fields of battle; and then, by the gentler operations of civil justice, gibbets, exile, and imprisonment, extirpate the few the sword had spared.

Such may, perhaps, be the language of some future philosophic historian, who, removed from all the passions, interests, and prejudices which dazzle the actors in these important scenes, shall relate the awful events of the present period. Such a man, perhaps, without considering the topics which are so forcibly impressed upon an English mind, the eternal and illimitable obedience which every colony owes to the parent state, the omnipotence of a British parliament, or the generous design of desolating an immense continent to make it free and happy, may regard nothing but the interests of humanity. With such a view of things he may, perhaps, execrate the authors of the American war as equally devoid of policy, public spirit, and humanity; and while he beholds on one side the rights of nature, the interests of mankind, a rising empire formed upon the noblest principles of equity and reason, and destined to prove a common refuge from European tyranny, he may see nothing on the other, but the low, illiberal aims of selfishness, avarice, and cruelty, that would, if possible, counteract the designs of Providence itself, engross its blessings, or convert them into curses for all the rest of the species. Should such a writer hereafter exist, it is probable he may add, after having brought the history of the American contest down to the present æra; such were the aims of the British ministry, but the weakness of their measures was equal to the iniquity of their councils. That noble country, which had so long been the bulwark of European liberty, was doomed at length to submit to the common yoke, a just reward for having deviated from its former principles, and become the instrument of oppression. Instead of the triumphs it had expected, instead of seeing the spoils of the persecuted colonies poured into its territories, instead of seeing the commerce of all the subject west enrich its merchants, baits which the vile incendiaries of the war had made use of with too much success, it was doomed to experience every ill it had endeavoured to inflict: its wealth was destined to circulate through the very country it had devoted to destruction; its commerce was gradually diminished by the depredations of its enemies,

mies, and by the intolerable impositions which were levied upon the people. Universal poverty and despair seemed to pervade the land; all ranks and orders of men begun to share in the general distress; the poor, the rich, the obscure, the great, the idle, the industrious, were all alike included in the unequalled miseries which had invaded the land, excepting the few who received the spoils of their sinking country, infected with its curses, and polluted with its blood. They now begun to perceive, with an anguish which it is difficult to express, that they had been deluded by the grossest artifices, to throw away the noblest prize that was ever possessed by mortals:—America was irreparably lost; yet was there no term proposed to their distresses, no hope of peace, no attention to spare the last resources of an exhausted nation.

In this extremity of public and private distress some remains of the ancient English spirit seemed to burst forth from the embers under which it had been so long concealed. All the real and disinterested friends of public freedom, all who had viewed with silent sorrow and indignation the progress of venality and the diminution of the people's influence, thought it necessary to unite in one last effort; and to prevent, if possible, their country's ruin, which seemed the inevitable consequence of such measures as were then pursued—Roused from a lethargy of so long and so fatal a duration, they viewed with astonishment and horror the complicated calamities which surrounded them, and rightly deemed, that all was lost, unless some check could be interposed to the prevailing corruptions of their government, and the people restored to their fundamental rights. The splendor of their meridian glory was indeed past, the dream of greatness dissipated, and the pageantry of empire lost; but peace, security, and freedom were yet attainable blessings, denied to violence and ambition, but bestowed on virtue.

Such may perhaps be the account hereafter given of the petitions lately offered by the English people: may it be added, that they were attended with the amplest success, and diffused returning vigour through every part of the constitution! That private interest and ambition, which had so long been suffered to triumph amidst their country's ruin, were thenceforth restrained within their proper and salutary bounds: that the enormous burthens under which the nation had so long groaned; which had been accumulated under such a variety of pretexts; which had equally served to impoverish the people and corrupt their representatives, were at length submitted to the wholesome regulations of a new tribunal, superior to every impression of fear and interest, and solely intent upon the great and necessary object of public œconomy! Above all, may it be said, that this great and constitutional reformation, by restoring the English people to all their rights, restored them to all their virtues! That waking from their disgraceful lethargy, they viewed the carnage and desolation which had been perpetrated in their name with horror and remorse; and that with the ancient hereditary generosity of their character, they begun to admire the very virtues they had so lately persecuted, and instead of invading the rights of others, turned their whole attention to the maintenance of their own!

Animated with these considerations, this Society, which feels for their country's wrongs with all the sensibility which becomes the name of Englishmen,

lishmen, have undertaken the task of rousing their countrymen to the defence of their hereditary rights. Convinced that all remaining hopes of safety are centred in the great body of the people, which, though sometimes deceived concerning the means, can voluntarily pursue no other end than the general happiness. They wish to awaken them from their lethargy—they wish to awaken them while the means of safety are yet left, before the English constitution shall have become a name which it is dangerous to pronounce, a shade which it is fatal to evoke. While it is yet permitted to appeal to the feelings and understanding of the nation, while there are no laws which fetter the activity of the mind, while neither perpetual imprisonment, nor death, nor torments, are denounced against the hardy citizen that shall remind his countrymen of their expiring privileges, they dare to perform that mournful but necessary duty. They therefore set before them their undoubted rights, so often vindicated, so often confirmed; rights established by immemorial usage, confirmed by the purest decisions of their legislators, and illustrated by the labours of men, whose understandings have been the ornament of humanity, as much as their private virtues were the honour of their country. Convinced, that those who wish to enslave mankind will always attempt to divert their attention from the danger which threatens their liberty, till the mortal wound has been received, they present an antidote to the poisons which have been so industriously diffused. They believe, that whatever disputes may happen concerning the origin of government, there can be none concerning its end and object. They are neither awed by the clouds of mysterious darkness which time has thrown around the basis of human establishments, nor by the fictitious rays with which superstition encircles particular brows; and they acknowledge no divinity in any form of government, farther than as it is a method of producing the common good, sanctified by the consent, and founded upon the necessities of the people. He that can believe otherwise, and while he admits that the Deity has given equal powers to all the species, passions to stimulate them to the pursuit of good, and reason to direct their choice, asserts that they are subjected, without resource, to the caprice of a few mortals, weak, contemptible, and bounded as themselves, may be called the friend of sovereigns, but must be reputed the enemy of human kind: he may as well imagine, that the lion is not to be resisted because he has fangs to tear; or the serpent, because he has poison to infect; but he will not persuade the African, that the arrow with which he pierces the monster's breast, or the javelin with which he nails the bloated reptile to the ground, does not equally enter into the design of Providence:—nor are such principles less dangerous to the safety of the ruler, than fatal to the rights of his subjects; for while they establish the throne of despotism upon the necks of half the species, they are equally favourable to the first usurper that can vault into the seat, and lash the affrighted steeds over the body of their former master.

If we mention these great principles of all human society, it is not because we appeal to them against the constitution of our country, but because this constitution is more immediately derived from them than is generally known. Amongst the many false and injurious calumnies which have been thrown upon those who distinguish between the interest of their country

country and that of an iniquitous faction, none is more common nor more unjust, than that of their attempting innovation. We cannot, therefore, better conclude our address upon this important subject, than by declaring, in the most explicit manner, that nothing is more foreign to the opinions and designs of the Society. But we have the less reason to be surprized at imputations like these, because they have always been the weapons made use of by the abettors of falshood against the friends of truth. With them it has always been the most unpardonable sedition to question the omnipotence of the prevailing power; and while the oppressors of mankind are allowed to avail themselves of every engine to overthrow the established privileges of their country, it is rebellion in the people to vindicate their invaded rights, or even to murmur at the encroachment. But it is not to such men that we appeal.

Let the ingenuous and uncorrupted part of our countrymen decide which are the real friends of the constitution, and which the introducers of innovation; those who would preserve it in its original vigour, or those who, with a seeming reverence for the forms, would annihilate the spirit; those who wish to free it from the dirt and filth which impede its motion, or those who would destroy the machine itself, rather than restore it to its former purity; those who contend for the clearest rights established in the most solemn manner, or those who, after having basely and surreptitiously invaded them, appeal to their own perfidy as a precedent. Lest what we have already said should not be sufficiently clear, we think it necessary to add, that we consider an hereditary sovereignty and nobility as essential parts of the constitution which we claim, and admirably adapted to the genius of the English nation. But at the same time that we declare our approbation of a limited prerogative and a privileged nobility, we would hope that there is no Englishman that is not false to the name, and a traitor to his country, that would wish to increase either of these powers at the expence of the third and most essential, the Commonalty of England. By what means the people have been deprived of their essential rights, by what imperceptible degrees the representatives of a whole nation have been changed into the deputies of a few paltry and venal boroughs; by what unconstitutional innovations these pretended representatives have assumed a power of extending their own existence, though it may be doubted, whether the acts they passed for that purpose are more valid than those of the Long Parliament after the abolition of the king and lords, we have sufficiently explained in the tracts we have already printed and dispersed. By what steps the immediate creatures of the people, invested with delegated powers to express the sense, and protect the rights of their constituents, have been gradually converted into the inveterate enemies and destroyers of every thing they were chosen to defend, will be sufficiently evident to all who have remarked the proceedings of our late parliaments. This only will we observe, that corruption has now so far exceeded its former limits, such widely-diffused calamities have been occasioned in its course, and such an open contempt has been expressed for the interests and approbation of the people, that the measure of our wrongs is full. As we can have no remaining hopes of redress from any thing but our own exertion, we solemnly invite the free and uncorrupted
part

part of the nation to unite for the assertion of their long-neglected rights, in the most dangerous crisis that ever threatened their destruction. And, as nothing seems better calculated to keep alive the sacred fire of public freedom, than to diffuse political and constitutional knowledge through the great body of the people, as nothing can more forcibly impel a community to struggle for its rights, than to give it just notions of their importance, and of the inevitable evils which must attend their loss, we presume to solicit the approbation and concurrence of all our generous countrymen to the design in which we are engaged. Let them reflect, that the battle is lost while every individual consults his private ease and safety, and that those are separately trampled upon, who collectively would be felt in the balance, and incline the scale. If there is yet room for additional evils, or new disgraces; if a people can submit to more degrading insults than have been already heaped upon our heads, it may be the part of prudence to wait the event, or embrace a mean and precarious neutrality; but if we have already reached the utmost verge of freedom and of honour, if the least advance is slavery and perdition, it becomes us here to make a stand with the determined obstinacy of men, who know they have neither retreat nor hope beyond the spot which they now occupy and defend.

DECLARATION OF RIGHTS,

Without which no Englishman can be a free Man, nor the English Nation a free People.

I. **T**HE Government of this Realm, and the making of Laws for the same, ought to be lodged in the Hands of King, Lords of Parliament, and the Representatives of *the whole Body* of the free Men of this Realm.

II. Every Englishman (Infants, insane Persons, and Criminals only excepted) is, of common Right, and by the Laws of God, a *free Man*, and intitled to the full Enjoyment of *Liberty*.

III. An Englishman's Liberty, or Freedom, consists in having an *actual Share*, either in Legislation itself, or in the *appointing* of those who are to frame the Laws; which, although they ought to protect him in the full Enjoyment of those absolute Rights, that are vested in him by the immutable Laws of Nature, may yet be fabricated to the Destruction of his Person, his Property, his religious Freedom, Family, and Fame.

IV. It is the Right of the Commons of England to elect a *new House* of Parliament Once at least in *every Year*: Because, when a Parliament continues for a longer Term than *one Session*, Thousands, who have attained to Man's Estate since it was elected, and are therefore entitled to enter into Possession of their best Inheritance, the actual Exercise of their elective Franchise, are in that Case unjustly *denied their Right* and *excluded from Freedom*.

Note 1st. Since the *all* of one Man is as dear to him as the all of another, the *poor* Man has an *equal* Right, but *more* Need, to have a Representative in Parliament than the rich one.

Note 2d. Those Englishmen who have *no* Votes for electing a Representative, are *not* free Men, as Justice and the Constitution of their Country require; but are enslaved to *the Representatives* of those who *have* Votes: For, to be enslaved, is to have *no Will of our own* in the Choice of Law-makers, but to be governed by Rulers whom *other Men have set over us*.

Note 3d. By the Operation of *one* unconstitutional Statute (8 Hen. VI.) enacted on *false Pretences*, a very great Majority of Englishmen are tyrannically debarred from their Birthright of voting for Members of Parliament, which was a sacred Inheritance enjoyed by their Forefathers, *until the enacting of that Statute*. Thus, by the Craft of Statesmen, the far greater

Part

Part of the English Nation are constantly *taxed without being represented*, and *compelled to obey Laws they never assented to*, which are the very *Definitions of Slavery*; and thus are Englishmen degraded to a Level with the very *Cattle in the Field*, or the *Sheep in the Fold*, which have no Voice to say, "*Why are we bought and sold! Why are we yoked and laden with heavy Burthens! Why are we fleeced and led to the Slaughter!*"

Note 4th. For the making of Laws, our Constitution knows no such Thing as *virtual Representation*. Members of Parliament are the *Attornies* of those they represent. Whoever heard that the Attorney of *John* shall dispose of the Property of *Thomas*, because *John* and *Thomas* happen to reside in the same Town or County?

Note 5th. Parliaments of *one Session* were the immemorial Usage of England from the earliest Antiquity, and our Right thereto stood confirmed in the written Law of the Land from the Time of the immortal *Alfred* down to the Reign of King *William III.* a Period of more than a thousand Years. In all that Time, not a single Disadvantage to Liberty from the Shortness of Sessional Parliaments was ever recorded in History; whereas longer Parliaments, in less than One hundred Years Time, have left us nothing of Liberty but the Name.

TO THE PEOPLE.

FRIENDS, COUNTRYMEN, AND FELLOW-CITIZENS;

THAT *Englishmen* could ever have been so infatuated, as to suffer either *annual* Parliaments, or the *universal* Right of Suffrage to be wrested from them, ought to be our Astonishment! In permitting the Innovations of *longer* Parliaments and *Qualifications* for electing, alas! they knew not what they did. By looking supinely on, while these wide Breaches were made for the Entrance of Corruption, they betrayed their Country. What they sowed in criminal Folly, it has been the Fate of their Posterity to gather in Sorrow and Calamity; and ours at length it is, either to stem the Tide of lawless Power, or to perish as a People. Our Constitution can only be safe so long as the *whole Body* of the English Commons can annually come forward with their Votes, to repel any Attack upon the common Liberty. Our Votes are our *political Arms of Defence*: the Gift of God to *all* for the Safety of *all*. By the traitorous Policy of *disarming* the greatest Part, the common Enemy, arbitrary Power, has now the Property and the Liberty of *all* at its Mercy. To resist its Force, or to purge a venal Parliament by which it is supported, is a Task far beyond the Strength of our few remaining Electors. Would they any longer call their Property their own, or retain the Dignity and the Blessings of Liberty, let them exhort their Fellow-citizens at large to associate in the common Cause; and then, with one Voice, a Voice of united Millions, let England assert her ancient Claim to Freedom, and resound with a firm Declaration of those *common Rights* which are the *common Defence*. Through her Committees, let her sober Resolutions flow to one common Centre; and there, matured into a complete and

comprehensive Plan of Reform, be laid before that House of Parliament which lives but by the Breath, and is bound to serve and to defend the Majesty of the People. And when the People, in Vindication of Truth and the Rights of Men, shall once exert that Voice which is felt and acknowledged to be the Voice of God, at the dread Sound, Despotism shall drop his Iron Sceptre in Dismay, and threaten no longer the Liberties of our Land; Truth and Justice shall be triumphant, and a Constitution of King, Lords, and Commons, *each free and independent of the other*, once more revisit our happy Isle!

It is by purifying the Fountain of Government, that the rising Generation is to be called off from debasing Pleasures, and animated to an Exertion of every generous and patriot Principle which can dignify the Mind of Man; and thus alone it is, that the faded Honours of our Country can be restored, and its Character and Prosperity again become the Admiration of Mankind, looking towards this Land of Liberty as their common Friend and Protector.

In pursuit of Reformation, every sincere Friend to his Country is solemnly called upon to practise that Christian Rule, to do unto others as we would that they should do unto us. Then will be established the just Rights of all Men, of the Poor as well as the Rich, the Weak as well as the Strong; and then will that blessed Æra come, when every one will be free and happy under the Shade of his own Vine.

Glory to God in the Higheft; and on Earth, Peace, Good-will towards Men!

A REAL FRIEND TO THE PEOPLE.

N. B. The Duke of Richmond, in his late Bill, has nobly vindicated the Rights of Englishmen, and to their full Extent, as stated in the foregoing Declaration. A similar Plan, as Materials for a Bill, has been also drawn up by a Sub-committee of Westminster, and circulated amongst the other Committees of this Kingdom.

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